



Indian Health Service

# Update

# Youth Initiative

*For more information on the Youth Initiative, contact: Donna Leno, Health Education Staff, Office of Health Programs, IHS, 301-443-1870, or Dr. Scott Nelson, Chief, Mental Health Programs Branch, IHS, 505-474-2873.*

The health of American Indian and Alaska Native young adults, adolescents, and children is of critical importance. These young adults and children are at a greater risk for serious mental health and substance abuse problems and experience higher incidences of abuse and neglect than their counterparts in other minority groups or the general population. Increased gang activity, school dropout rate, and teen pregnancy have been reported during the last decade in many American Indian and Alaska Native communities. These statistics make it imperative that the Indian Health Service (IHS) give added emphasis to programs and strategies that can increase the chance for a healthy and productive life for all American Indian and Alaska Native youth.

The Director's Youth Initiative will examine and address multiple health issues of American Indian and Alaska Native youth with an emphasis on substance abuse, mental health, and child abuse. The Initiative serves as a focus to assist leaders of the Agency build working relationships with youth groups, Indian organizations, and tribal and urban health programs to address the issues of youth health.

A workgroup recommendation under consideration is for a Youth Advisory Board to advise the Office of the Director. A recommendation that the Agency issue guidelines to establish Youth Advisory Boards at the local health delivery level is also being considered. The workgroup will also develop guidelines for achieving youth health goals consistent with Healthy People 2000 and will address priorities identified by Indian youth groups. Under consideration by the Youth Workgroup is a method for compiling information regarding existing youth programs, resources, and initiatives of the IHS, Federal agencies, tribes, and States. The workgroup will be a source of information to assist tribal and urban health leaders in developing health care programs.

Current IHS clinically based intervention efforts, model programs, and information reports available in support of the youth initiative include: *Training on Child Abuse Victim Treatment; A Model for Family Violence Prevention in Indian Communities; Tribal Sexual Abuse Intervention and Prevention Projects; A Juvenile Sexual Offender Treatment Program; A National Adolescent Suicide Prevention Project; A Family Violence Prevention Team; Child and Adolescent Consultation; Intra- and Interagency Collaboration on Family Violence Prevention Activities; A Child Abuse and Family Violence Prevention and Treatment Plan (draft); Suicide Intervention Programs in Indian Country; and the American Indian/Alaska Native Suicide Report (draft).*